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The 1970 British Commonwealth Games: Scottish reactions to apartheid and sporting boycotts

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Abstract

The 1970 British Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh is widely thought to have been a barnstorming success, and an excellent advertisement for Scotland. Recent research by the authors, however, shows that the event was nevertheless a deeply politicized one: reflective of Scotland's status as a 'stateless nation', of Westminster politics during the era more generally, and of the politics surrounding apartheid South Africa's sporting contacts with the outside world. The Games managed to avert a mass boycott organized by the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC), in retaliation for the Marylebone Cricket Club's recent invitation of the South African national cricket team.

This article will explore Scotland's place as a non-state actor within the 1970 crisis. Attention will be given to the domestic political response, both from Scottish MPs, members of local Scottish councils (particularly within Edinburgh itself), and from Scottish National Party (SNP) activists, angered that Scotland should pay for the crimes perceived to be made by an English sporting body. However, our piece goes beyond these discourses, to examine the broader sporting relationship that Scots had with South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), governed by white supremacist regimes during the period. Policy documents, housed in the National Records of Scotland, express UK Cabinet-level concerns about the actions of individual sporting clubs' tours of the countries. This article will also look at how cabinet ministers, most notably Labour's Minister for Sport Denis Howell, intervened to shape Scotland's devolved sporting councils' policies on contacts with South Africa and Rhodesia.

Keywords

Commonwealth Games; Scotland; South Africa; Rhodesia; Apartheid

Introduction

The 1970 British Commonwealth Games is often regarded as the apotheosis of the competition. Dubbed "the Friendly Games" by Prince Philip, the Games' presentation and ceremony was a colorful celebration of all things British, Scottish, and royal. It represented a triumph of the "unionist" (small "u") consensus of Scottish politics during the 1960s and 1970s.¹ (The term "unionist" in British/Scottish politics describes support for the Union between Scotland and England.) However, history has been quick to forget the diplomatic threats posed to this event, instead focusing on parallel and interconnected events within England regarding the invitation of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) to the South African

national squad. The threatened boycotts almost led to the cancellation of the Commonwealth event, and we will argue can be used to expose the internal political divisions within Scottish and British societies on issues of racism, decolonization, and nationalisms. Little has been written about Scottish sport within a paradiplomatic context – unlike for example, Catalonia and the Basque Country.² The British Government essentially acted in Scotland's place to mediate sporting contact both with South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).³ Furthermore on matters such as this during this period, Ministers for Sport did not typically create dynamic policies, but rather strictly adhered to broader government strictures.⁴ At least in terms of paradiplomatic contact, local government – in this case the Edinburgh Corporation – the established Scottish tabloid press, as well as a burgeoning pro-independence movement, offered alternative means of negotiating to ensure that Scotland's "voice" was heard by the outside world. Essentially they all represented very different perspectives on Scottish identity and politics, therefore making paradiplomatic overtures less coherent than would be the case in the future, once the process of Scottish devolution was initiated in the late 1990s. As this article will demonstrate, it was often non-state actors such as sports' national governing bodies (NGBs) which played an important role in informal diplomatic relations; they were trusted, and often manipulated, by government to enforce foreign policy. However, as we will show, things were rarely straightforward, with NGBs sometimes exploiting their relationship with government to different, often opposing ends.

The Games and the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Games are perhaps unique in their formation; based as they are on historical links rather than simple geographical location. Each of the participating countries has been subsumed within the British Empire at some point in their history. It has been noted by Dheensaw that the concept of the Commonwealth is "baffling to those who are not in the Commonwealth" and "equally baffling to some member nations."⁵ Indeed the Commonwealth serves little strategic purpose; it is not a military organization nor an economic grouping. It could be argued that its main role is one of "talking-shop", heads of government from each of the member countries meet every other year to discuss key political situations, while ministers of key areas such as trade, health, finance and justice meet every two years to discuss specific issues. The Commonwealth exists largely because

its member countries share one common experience, that of the Empire and the way in which it shaped the cultural heritage of each of these nations.

J. Astley Cooper is often cited as the founding father of the Empire Games, the forerunner of what would later become the British Empire and Commonwealth Games after the Second World War, by 1970 the British Commonwealth Games, and post-1978 the Commonwealth Games.⁶ In a letter to the *Times* October 1891, Cooper first articulated a vision for sporting competitions to be held every four years between the English-speaking nations of the world, largely as a celebration of Empire and perceived common historical roots.⁷ The late nineteenth century had seen the first attempts by colonies to break free from the Empire and by the early years of the twentieth century it has become apparent that the structure of the Empire needed to evolve if it was to survive. Attempts were made to strengthen the bonds between nations; one such attempt was the Festival of Empire, a series of events organized to celebrate the coronation of George V. The Festival of Empire Sports Meeting was arguably the first modern Commonwealth Games. It was held on June 24, 1911 at Crystal Palace in London as an intrinsic part of the wider Festival of Empire. At this first meeting there were only four sports; track and field, boxing, swimming and wrestling. There were also only four nations competing; Great Britain, Canada, Australasia (Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania) and South Africa. Canada won, having achieved the most gold medals. The First World War delayed any further attempt to develop the idea of an Empire Sports Meeting. However, in early 1924 Norton Hervey Crowe, a Canadian, began lobbying for what he described as an “All-British Empire Games, to be held between the Olympic Games.”⁸ Crowe’s idea received official backing from the Canadian Amateur Athletics Union (CAAU). It was the CAAU which pushed forward with the idea of developing a British Empire Games or Olympics, as it was interchangeably referred to. They lobbied sport organizations, managers and colonial representatives. Their idea was met with a warm reception from most members of the Empire, but notably support from Britain itself was less than enthusiastic. Robinson, one of the main lobbyists from Canada felt that the “Old Country’s” resistance was in part due to a political aligning of Britain with Europe and a concern that the establishment of an “Empire only” event would be viewed exclusionary and also undermining to the Olympics. However, despite these initial reservations the first British Empire Games was held in Hamilton, Canada on August 16-23, 1930. Countries within the

Commonwealth would 'bid' to host the Games. It would not be until 1966 that the event was outside a "white" dominion of the Empire – in this instance, Kingston, Jamaica.⁹

Broader context of Scotland, South Africa, Rhodesia, and sport in the 1960s and 1970s

The events of the 1970 Commonwealth Games cannot and should not be viewed within a vacuum. Scotland's "voice" remained a nebulous concept around 1970: there was no devolved assembly, and the apparatus of state, such as it was, existed in the office of the Secretary of State for Scotland. The MCC debacle was only one of a number of sporting controversies involving Scotland, South Africa, and Rhodesia during this period. Post-War South Africa introduced a complicated system of racial segregation. Apartheid was a policy which, through the 1948 Population Registration Act, ensured only white South Africans could hold the reins of power; this included white-only participation in elite sport.¹⁰ Whilst Rhodesian sport did not formalize its institutional discrimination of black athletes to the same extent as South Africa, secondary discrimination outside of the arena of competition was nevertheless enshrined in the 1969's Land Tenure Act, and the country maintained an interdependent sporting relationship with South Africa.¹¹ The implications of these policies on domestic and international sports participation were wide-reaching.¹²

Parallel to the MCC/Commonwealth Games crisis was one tour that was far less remarked upon, but every bit as ethically contentious: that of Kilmarnock Football Club's summer 1970 tour of Rhodesia.¹³ This tour highlights the complexity of the diplomatic process which went on behind closed doors between the UK government, Kilmarnock, and the Scottish Football Association (SFA). The Rhodesian crisis came about as a result of the minority white government of Southern Rhodesia unilaterally declaring its independence from the UK in 1965, ostensibly to prevent a timetable for majority rule from being introduced. The Wilson government's policy towards Rhodesia was explicitly one of isolation, in contrast to a more loosely-interpreted policy towards South Africa; this included trade sanctions and currency restrictions. From 1967 onwards, this approach was broadened to include all sporting contacts, arguing that they were a form of "comfort to the illegal regime in Rhodesia".¹⁴ The Wilson and Heath governments were not wholly uniform in their informal approaches towards this part of the boycott: in the case of Heath's Conservatives, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office even lobbied the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to allow

Rhodesia to participate in the 1972 Olympics in Munich, a development which, once again, a threatened boycott of African nations would put paid to.¹⁵

National governing bodies of sport (NGBs) played an important if often behind-the-scenes in sporting diplomacy during this period. The British government informally negotiated with British sporting bodies who had contacts with Rhodesia (and SA?) to prevent tours. Amongst these were the Scottish Football Association (SFA), and more specifically in this case Kilmarnock Football Club. Government records indicate that measures to prevent the SFA from calling off Kilmarnock's participation would prove fruitless; and, in many respects, football's authorities called ministers' bluff. Willie Allan, president of the SFA, was quoted by one civil servant as saying: "if the Government wants clubs not to do a particular thing, they should come out into the open and prevent it actively".¹⁶ Sir John Lang, the deputy chairman of the British Sports Council, more or less confirmed both the SFA's and the Government's unwillingness to become directly involved in the Kilmarnock saga:

I doubt whether we can rely on the Scottish Football Association exerting much pressure notwithstanding their action last year and in any event, the "legal" position is that they have no power under their rules to refuse permission to a club to play matches overseas in country which is properly affiliated to FIFA as is case with Rhodesia... I would not have thought that it would be wise for the Government to comment on the tour in an open statement issued in London.¹⁷

As Little states, elements of British public opinion were not unsympathetic to Rhodesia.¹⁸

The Dundee tabloid *Courier and Advertiser's* own opinion of Kilmarnock's tour confirmed an element of this:

Kilmarnock Football Club are off to Rhodesia. They will play eight games out there. They are quite right to go in spite of enthusiasm from Whitehall. Rhodesians will have a chance to see a first-class Scottish club in action. And the presence of these sporting ambassadors will show the vindictive attitude of the British Government towards Rhodesia is certainly not shared by very many people – particularly in Scotland.¹⁹

Football was not usually included in much of the Anti-Apartheid Movement's direct action program, and Scottish footballers' relationships with South Africa and Rhodesia was of a very different nature to rugby and cricket. At the time, the white-only National Football

League of South Africa heavily recruited second-tier European footballers to play in its leagues, and this included many Scots, some of whom answered advertisements in local newspapers. Those Scottish football clubs who toured South Africa in previous decades included Dundee United and Heart of Midlothian.²⁰ Scottish football and footballers' connections with South Africa and Rhodesia, then, exemplified older undercurrents of imperial labor and race relations that continued throughout this period.

Publicly, the Government took a hard line, but behind the scenes, as the case with Kilmarnock FC highlights, they were more measured in their approach, preferring a process of negotiating through a third party. The debates surrounding these tours highlight the multifaceted nature of the Government's approach to diplomatic relations with South Africa and Rhodesia. This was not the first time that the Government had attempted to subtly intervene in football clubs' tours in Rhodesia: Clyde toured the country in 1969, and the proposed tours of the country by Celtic in 1968 and 1972.²¹ When Conservative Minister for Sport, Eldon Griffiths, was installed in 1970, he continued in a similarly informal vein, seeking to discourage rather than explicitly prevent groups from touring the country, as highlighted by a handwritten internal memo from March 17, 1972 which begged the question regarding Celtic's possible tour that summer: "What do we do to discourage Celtic? The SFA have already told us that they have no power to order a club to abandon a visit, so I suggest we await something more definite – by which time of course it may be too late for changing plans."²² (Celtic, ultimately, did not make the trip.)

Similarly, throughout the late-1960s to the mid-1970s, the Government entered into informal discussions with key actors, primarily NGBs to ensure that no sports teams would travel to or host events with Rhodesia or South Africa. These discussions covered a wide range of sports. For example, with England and Wales having been invited to play hockey in Rhodesia in 1971, there were growing concerns that Scotland would receive a similar invite. Behind the scenes, ministers worked hard to ensure that Scottish Hockey would reject any such invitation if it was forthcoming.²³ Government approaches remained informal, even to the point of NGBs receiving funding to tour in South Africa, if not necessarily Rhodesia. Scottish and Welsh Sports Council policy during the Heath years was noted roughly as thus:

Rhodesia: Teams should be discouraged from visiting Rhodesia but cannot be prevented. No assistance of any kind should be given by the Sports Councils.

South Africa: Sports Councils may make travel grants at the normal rates (up to 66 2/3 per cent) provided there is no restriction on the racial composition of the British team concerned.²⁴

Once Howell and Labour came back into office in 1974, the approach changed with the government deciding that there needed to be a more formal policy towards NGBs' interactions with South Africa and Rhodesia. Howell, on playing sport against South Africa, stated:

This is the most delicate area of all. About one thing I am adamant – no one is going to use money from British Government grants in any way at all to go and play sports against countries which recognise apartheid. As in the D'Oliveira case, there may also be exceptional cases to stop any team going. On the other hand we cannot interfere with individual rights when other issues, for example the Commonwealth Games, are not threatened.²⁵

In Scotland and Wales, this was achieved by introducing stringent criteria for funding by government-sponsored sports councils. Under these new criteria, NGBs were no longer able to apply for money to tour either country, or host teams from them.²⁶ The policy had limited impact, as some sports were not reliant on grants from the governments: Whitehall mandarins noted that such a policy would not affect rugby, for instance.²⁷

When discussing Scottish clubs' tours of South Africa and Rhodesia, it is crucial to discuss examples beyond elite, commercial sport. Even sports such as sea angling were denied government support: in September 1970, the Scottish Federation of Sea Anglers placed an application with the Scottish Sports Council for funding to attend an international competition being held in Durban in February 1971. Despite the Council finding in favor of the application, funding was denied by the intervention of Secretary of State for Scotland Gordon Campbell.²⁸ Nevertheless, individual sports such as golf received minimal government attention. South African golfer Gary Player was a regular attendee of matches in Scotland during the period.²⁹ In the 1980s, Scottish golfers Sam Torrance and Sandy Lyle went to South Africa to compete. Other individuals such as footballer Gordon Smith and jockey Willie Carson also went to South Africa in pursuit of sporting opportunities, in spite of

stronger, more popular opposition to apartheid within Scotland.³⁰ Not all individuals in the early 1970s got off so lightly: the case of Sally Little, a young South African golfer, and her participation at one Scottish tournament in 1970, highlighted the fears that those in sport's NGBs had about an increasingly militant anti-apartheid movement. This case happened as concerns about boycotts to the 1970 Commonwealth Games reached their peak, and may in part explain the reaction to her participation, or lack thereof. The *Daily Record's* Alex Cameron, for one, was angry about the way that Little had been treated, and saw her withdrawal as symptomatic of the chaos associated with the "Stop the 70 Tour" movement:

Because in the most pompous, craziest decision yet in the steadily brewing apartheid row in sport, the England-based Ladies' Golf Union have asked [Little] to opt out. They say they fear disturbances by demonstrators on the course when the championship is played at Gullane, East Lothian, if South African Sally Little, 18, takes part. Instead, the golfing ladies have been foolish before the event – primly imagining a pitched battle on the Gullane beaches because a girl whose views on apartheid are not even known wants to play a game. Scotland has never segregated its athletes and will welcome Gary Player for the Open Championship at St. Andrews. To say Scots would demonstrate at Gullane against a pretty little girl who happens to have been born in South Africa disregards Scots commonsense. Miss Little's forced withdrawal after this misguided pressure by an England-based organisation is an insult to the good sense and sportsmanship of all of us in Scotland.³¹

The context of the 1970 Commonwealth Games, then, highlighted the somewhat unique position Scotland was in with regard both the anti-apartheid movement, as well as its existence as a polity outside of the United Kingdom. Despite government attempts to mediate sporting interactions between Scotland and South Africa and Rhodesia, these were not always successful.

As we have seen the actions surrounding the 1970 Commonwealth and the MCC were part of a much larger sustained campaign against sporting contacts with South Africa. The 1976 Olympics in Montreal were boycotted by African nations over the participation of New Zealand, who had recently invited the South African national rugby union squad.³² However, as Jeffreys has noted, the Commonwealth Games, by virtue of their scale, and shared history, were far more vulnerable to a damaging boycott.³³ The 1978 Commonwealth

Games in Edmonton were hit by a small-scale Nigerian boycott.³⁴ Developing out of this movement was the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement, made by Commonwealth heads of state, it stipulated that nation-states should have no sporting contacts with South Africa.³⁵ However, the UK and New Zealand never fully signed up to this; and, consequently by far the most damaging event of all was the mass boycott of the 1986 Commonwealth Games, also held in Edinburgh.³⁶ By hosting the 1970 and 1986 events, Scotland briefly became the focus of international debate around sporting interactions with South Africa.

The 1970 Commonwealth Games and the MCC Tour

The 1970 British Commonwealth Games took place against the background of a British general election campaign, with Labour leader and Prime Minister Harold Wilson sensing an opportunity to solidify his majority. However, this did not go according to plan, with the election of a majority Conservative government led by Edward Heath. Scottish politics, too, had become more complex during this period, with the Hamilton by-election victory of Winifred Ewing in 1967, marking her as the first sitting MP for the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP). The party had been galvanized by the recent discovery of North Sea oil, linking it to an ability to finance an independent Scottish state.³⁷ Scottish parliamentary politics for the most part remained dominated by the Labour Party, with a healthy minority for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, followed by the Liberals. The SNP, however, would gain a major breakthrough in the two general elections of 1974, when they returned 11 MPs, and the period 1974-79 in the UK would see the country governed by a vulnerable Labour government.³⁸ The political instability of the period, in part, helps to explain the rather toothless, incoherent responses to British sporting contacts with South Africa and Rhodesia, including those in Scotland.

From the 1960s onwards, there had been growing disquiet amongst the international community about South Africa's racial policies. This growing disquiet began to manifest itself in many ways, including the banning of international tours of South African teams by certain countries, attempts to block South African participation in international sporting events such as the Olympics and concerted efforts to stop national teams from touring in South Africa. Most popular amongst these approaches was the sports boycott. As Little has demonstrated, sports boycotts were initiated by both governmental and non-governmental

organizations, and were “one of a range of non-violent measures available to governments to exert pressure on targeted states, with others including economic, political, and cultural measures”.³⁹

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics arguably marked one of the early successful attempts to use the threat of a boycott. A campaign led by African, Asian, and “coloured” South Africans, and supported by various international sportspersons, lobbied the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to ban the all-white South African National Olympic Committee (SANOC) from the forthcoming Olympics.⁴⁰ Also in 1963, a group of South African exiles in London formed a pressure group, the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC); however, SANROC’s remit was broader than the Olympics, as they wanted to ensure the isolation of South Africa from a variety of sporting theatres. SANROC had subsequently successfully lobbied for a boycott should a non-integrated South African team be admitted into the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City: the IOC accordingly withdrew its invitation to the state, but only after the USSR and fourteen other teams threatened to withdraw. It was at this point South Africa was expelled altogether from the Olympic movement, becoming the first country to have been handed such a punishment.⁴¹

Sanctions against South Africa were becoming commonplace in many sports during this period, especially within cricket.⁴² The 1968 D’Oliveira affair typifies this: 1968-69, the Marylebone Cricket Club’s (MCC) proposed to tour South Africa. However, the tour was cancelled after the South African government’s Prime Minister BJ Vorster refused to allow the team to play Basil D’Oliveira, a South African-born “colored” cricketer who played for England.⁴³ Despite this attempt to meddle in overseas teams’ selections whilst touring South Africa – attempts which caused outrage within some sporting and diplomatic circles – the MCC were still reluctant to give up on their relationship with South Africa. In 1970, the MCC extended an invitation to South Africa to tour England that summer. Almost immediately, there was a backlash amongst activists within SANROC and the UK’s Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM): a new more militant, direct action-based pressure group, the Stop the Seventy Tour campaign (STST), led by South African exile and future Labour politician Peter Hain, was formed. The STST utilized the South African rugby team’s tour of England during the winter of 1969-70 to practice the kinds of tactics they planned for the cricket tour: pitch

invasions, disruption of play, and mass demonstrations.⁴⁴ With this new threat, the MCC initially stood firm, seeing their role as “to uphold the rights of the individual to play and watch cricket”.⁴⁵ Growing concern over the ability of the police and the MCC to protect players and property led to an emergency executive committee meeting on February 12, where it was decided to cut the tour from 28 matches to twelve, which were to be held at a limited number of grounds that were perceived to be more easily secured.⁴⁶

The British Commonwealth Games being held in Edinburgh that year were viewed by SANROC as a potential target for further action in order to pressure the MCC and the British Government to cancel the South African cricket tour. On the April 24, 1970 the first public threats were made regarding African, Asian, Caribbean nations’ attendance at the Games with the Executive Committee of the Supreme Council of Sport in Africa sending notification that its thirteen members would not be attending the Games if the MCC tour went ahead.⁴⁷ A few days later SANROC requested that the Commonwealth Games organizing bodies declared their opposition to racism in sport and condemning the proposed MCC tour.⁴⁸

At first, both the Edinburgh organizing committee and the Commonwealth Games Federation projected a bullish image with regard to the threatened boycott. The chairman of the organizing committee, Sir Herbert Brechin stated:

The Games will definitely go on.... I cannot understand why the British Commonwealth countries would do anything that would affect their Games, particularly in a matter about something over which we have no control. We have absolutely no control over the actions of the MCC. We are a multi-racial organisation with no colour bar. There is no question of the Games being called off. So far £170,000 worth of tickets out of £250,000 have been sold, so the Games would not suffer financially if the African countries withdrew. But we are still hoping there will be no withdrawals by Commonwealth countries.⁴⁹

Brechin accused SANROC’s authorities of reverse racism, and stated that their attempts to destroy the spirit of the Games would be fruitless:

Any decision on this question would be taken by the British Commonwealth Games Federation in London. I do not think SANROC are deliberately stirring up trouble, but what they are doing is tantamount to this. We want to bring the black and white

people together under the roof of the Commonwealth Games. What SANROC and also Mr. David Steel, the Liberal MP for the Borders, are doing is trying to perpetuate apartheid. They are trying to separate black and white. I think the African countries are very keen to come to Scotland, and I will say now that the Games will go on. And that is quite definite.⁵⁰

Later, Brechin stated that the Games chiefs would fight “blackmail”, stating that: “What they are attempting to do is to create a spirit of depression, but what is apparent quite definitely is that this city will host the finest Commonwealth Games yet”.⁵¹ As the row rumbled on, at a meeting of the Games’ Executive Committee on May 22, Brechin was confronted by other members of the organising committee, who stated his personal views given to the press were not theirs. This included an angry Labour city councilor, Magnus Williamson, whose public remarks will be discussed in the next section. Nevertheless, Brechin was given a vote of confidence by the Board; he afterwards thanked the Board, and “reiterated that at no time had he made any political biased statement”. Ever optimistic, the board noted that only Uganda, Pakistan, and Zambia had officially communicated their withdrawals.⁵²

Official sporting bodies also released statements encouraging Commonwealth members to ignore what was happening with the MCC tour, and instead attend the Commonwealth Games as planned. The UK Sports Council stated:

With regards to the particular question of the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, the Sports Council believes that the longer term interests of the multi-racial sport in the Commonwealth transcend all other aspects of the issue. In support of the British Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland and the Sports Council for Scotland, the Sports Council urges all countries who have already accepted invitations to the Edinburgh Games to send teams to participate.⁵³

It would not be until May 22 that the MCC would cancel the tour, and only after heavy pressure from Prime Minister Wilson and Home Secretary Jim Callaghan.⁵⁴ The cancellation ended the pressure on the Commonwealth Games, and ensured that they would go ahead as initially planned. In the strict terms of sporting success, SANROC’s threatened boycott had worked in successfully getting the MCC to rescind their invitation to the South African team.

In contrast by the time the 1986 Commonwealth Games came around, things had progressed so far that this form of government-led diplomacy was no longer feasible, and therefore widespread boycotting of the 1986 Games – in protest of the UK Government’s trade relationship with South Africa – was inevitable. The Edinburgh 1986 Commonwealth Games, at least as far as the UK was concerned, was arguably the climax of direct action, in terms of anti-apartheid within the international sporting arena.⁵⁵ The issues discussed in the run up to the 1986 Games mirror many of the same discourses used in the build up to 1970.

Scotland and the 1970 Crisis

Insights into the crisis can be gained through an examination of different perspectives within Scottish civic society: those of the Scottish National Party, the Edinburgh Corporation, and major Scottish newspapers. David McCrone, in his highly influential work on the sociology of Scotland, states that the “Scottish myth” – one that primarily depicts Scotland as an inherently egalitarian nation – is a deeply entrenched one with Scottish society.⁵⁶ Our research here challenges the idea that there was any unified response to Africa’s white regimes within Scottish sport; and, while not necessarily disagreeing with Bryan Glass’s assertion that pillars of Scottish society (such as the Church of Scotland) played a significant role in opposing these regimes, the idea that there was a coherent response is questionable.⁵⁷

The Scottish National Party

Scotland’s anomalous status as a “stateless nation” within the UK added a unique dimension and opportunity to try to save the Games: within the world of British and European sport, Scotland was often recognized as a distinct polity: it was, nevertheless, one that was only recognized by some.⁵⁸ Dennis Brutus, the president of SANROC, made clear that *he* did not recognize a distinction between Scotland and England in the context of international sporting relations, stating: “It’s got everything to do with the South African cricket tour. People in other parts of the world do not distinguish between Scottish and British responsibilities.”⁵⁹ That did not, however, keep the SNP from suggesting a novel solution for solving the crisis: banning England. Towards the end of April, the SNP sent a cable to Abraham Ordia, the president of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, stating that it

would be “tragic” if the boycott went forward, stating that “responsibility for the South African tour lies in England not in Scotland”.⁶⁰ Dr. David Stevenson, the overseas secretary of the SNP, sent another letter to Ordia, emphasizing the foreign nature of cricket to Scots: “Cricket is of little interest in Scotland – but it is highly regarded in England. English cricket teams are clearly English, and are not referred to as British or United Kingdom teams”. Stevenson stated that, thus, “a more appropriate action might be a call for the exclusions of England from the Games”.⁶¹ As the threatened boycott progressed, the party’s sole MP, Winifred Ewing, along with party chairman William Woolf and director of communications Douglas Crawford, met up with the Ugandan high commissioner, Paul Orono Etiang, to reassure them that Scotland was not to blame for what was happening with the MCC:

We wanted to ensure that the countries which have threatened to withdraw do come to the Games. I think we feel a bit bitter. We are a non-racial society in Scotland. It is pretty hard luck that we are suffering for the sins of our neighbour. I think it ought to be recognised that Scotland is a separate entity. If it is not recognised, England ought to withdraw from the Games.⁶²

Ironically, the tenor of Ewing’s comments would be reiterated by Labour politicians in the run-up to the 1986 Commonwealth Games; namely, that Scotland did not elect the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, and thus has little culpability for her more open trade policies towards South Africa.⁶³ However, once again, the Games’ authorities reacted incredulously at the suggestion to exclude England. Sandy Duncan, the secretary of the British Commonwealth Games Federation, stated that: “England will definitely take part”, and adding rather patronizingly: “Don’t forget that at the last Games in Jamaica, England won 80 medals and the whole of the African states only 30”.⁶⁴

The Edinburgh Corporation

Local government, in particular the Edinburgh Corporation, who were responsible for the hosting and coordination of the 1970 Games, were also highly vocal about the possibility of a boycott. However, there was little, if any, unified voice.

The May 5, 1970 elections in Edinburgh produced a hung council, with the Progressives – a loose anti-Labour grouping that shared similarities with “Moderate” parties in Scottish municipal elections – existing as Edinburgh’s largest party, with Labour heading up the

opposition.⁶⁵ These Scottish local government elections took place in the throes of raging debates about the MCC invitation of South Africa to England; and, almost immediately, calls were made for the Edinburgh Corporation to clarify where it stood on the issue. One Progressive bailie, Portobello's Kenneth Borthwick (who would later become the chair of 1986's ill-fated Games), stated on 8 May that he would table a motion at the next council meeting demanding that the MCC cancel the tour. "There must", he said, "be a build-up of objection to the South African tour."⁶⁶ Five days later, the Lord Provost's Committee held an acrimonious emergency debate on the issue: the committee voted 10 to 6 to pass on without comment a letter from the Craighentinn Ward Labour Party condemning the MCC tour. Labour councillor Magnus Williamson demanded an end to the "waffling and mealy-mouthed statements", and described the Committee's decision not to officially comment as "cowardice". But while Labour was staunchly in favor of the motion, the Conservatives and Progressives on the Town Council were decidedly less enamored, with their arguments resting on not even having the authority to plead their case.⁶⁷ Councillor RM Knox stated: "We are being blackmailed. We have nothing to do with the invitation the MCC has given to a team from another country. We have no control over them." Councillor William Simpson-Bell, meanwhile, taunted Wilson, stating: "It is not for the Town Council to interfere in the internal affairs of another country. Has the Prime Minister the guts to [veto the tour]? He won't do it because there is an election pending."⁶⁸

South Africa, mindful of its historic links with Scotland, was accused of intervening subtly in the crisis, and of informally approaching the Edinburgh Corporation on apparently unrelated matters.⁶⁹ The leader of the Labour group Jack Kane insinuated that South African officials were lobbying for influence within British council chambers. This was in relation to a request by the General Smuts War Veterans' Foundation to send a message of support marking the centenary of Jan Smuts's birth.⁷⁰ Back in the Corporation chambers, the debate on the Commonwealth Games came to a head on May 21, when an attempt to keep the Labour motion from reaching the floor of the Council was quashed by 38 to 6, with several abstentions in the Progressive ranks. Former councillor Donald Renton, who spoke on behalf of Craighentinn Labour, advocated a direct dialogue between Commonwealth member nations and the Edinburgh council, stating that: "I believe that this plea [to cancel the tour] will fall on deaf ears unless this Edinburgh Corporation stand in the forefront of an all-out

campaign here in Scotland against the decision taken by the Cricket Council and in favour of the termination of the tour.”⁷¹

One of the only other local authorities to pass comment on the potential 1970 boycott was that of Edinburgh’s rival city, Glasgow. The city’s Labour leader, John Mains, offered a motion to urge the Wilson government to condemn South Africa’s tour, but the motion to hold an emergency debate on the subject fell short of the required two-third majority needed to pass. Conservative and Progressive councilors were serenaded with cries of “shame” and “cowards” for doing so.⁷² If the body politic of Scottish local government, however, failed to react in any discernable way, they were not alone, for major Scottish newspapers also failed to offer any unified response, with some seemingly hedging their bets.

Scottish newspapers

Tabloid and populist newspaper titles in Scotland during the period certainly had opinions on a possible impending boycott. The circumstances were very different to what was the case in the run-up to the chaotic 1986 Games, as the circumstances of both mega-event management and South Africa’s place in the sporting world had changed considerably by the late 1980s.⁷³ 1986, by comparison to 1970, elicited a far greater volume of opinions and correspondence on the subject; nevertheless, what does exist for 1970 in the media is similarly representative of wider debates. The lead articles could be broadly categorized within three positions on the crisis. The first laid the blame at the feet of the sporting institution; in this case, the MCC. The second position straddled a tightrope: criticising the boycotting nations, but outward sympathy towards their positions, whilst laying the blame at powers outside of Scottish society and politics. The third disagreed wholly with these two positions, and viewed the boycotters as “blackmailers”.

Several newspapers were notable in their condemnation of those institutions perceived to be at fault for the nations’ boycotts. The May 20, 1970 leader of the *Daily Record* slammed the MCC – the “flannelled fools of England”, as it referred to them – for refusing to cancel their invitation to South Africa’s cricket team:

What idiots of double-talk these mandarins of cricket are! They accept that the proposed tour should go on next month and say, in the same breath, that they won't accept another tour on the same line of race discrimination. By refusing to cancel the tour, the Cricket Council are contemptuously flouting the pleas of all who work for racial harmony in Britain.⁷⁴

Similarly, in their April 25, 1970 leader, the *Press and Journal* praised SANROC's demands for the Edinburgh Corporation to pressure the CGF and Games' organizers, so as to place the onus further on the MCC, which it stated was "tacitly condon[ing] apartheid."⁷⁵ The May 12, 1970 *Press and Journal* leader followed on from this line of thought, believing that the Labour government's banning of the tour would be seen as "an act of political wisdom".⁷⁶ The *Evening Times*, upon India's threat to withdraw from the 1970 Games, stated that: "It is not just an extremist minority which is objecting to the South African team, and South Africa's policies, but the representatives of millions of coloured people. The MCC should think again."⁷⁷ In the mind of the press, then, the threatened boycott of non-African countries signaled a potential escalation of what had hitherto been regarded as a minor diplomatic issue.

Initially, in their April 27, 1970 leader, the *Edinburgh Evening News* referred to the SANROC boycott as "an odd way to fight apartheid":

Nothing can be seen to be more opposed to the idea of apartheid than the staging of a sporting event in which all races mixed and compete as equals. This is what the Commonwealth Games are all about and equality of all peoples within the Commonwealth has been the credo of those who started the Games and of those who have sponsored them over the years... Closing down the Games is something more than disruption. It is turning away a tremendous opportunity to show the world that the people of this country believe in racial equality and practise it.⁷⁸

The irony of believing an event initially started by its founders as "the British Empire Games" to be a supposed fount of racial equality was not noted. But, as the pressure grew on the Games' officials, the paper changed its tune slightly; its May 13 leader attacked the "incredible selfishness" of the MCC, stating that it was "a serious threat to the success of the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh in July."⁷⁹ The blame, here, was laid not at the boycotting nations, but at the English cricketing authorities.

The *Courier and Advertiser* held an animus towards sporting boycotters: before the 1970 Games, its May 13, 1970 leader, even supported the MCC tour, and viewed the African nations' attitude as "blackmail", childish behavior, and – additionally – a threat to British people's freedoms. Here, standing firm against the "black Commonwealth" was a line in the sand:

[Harold Wilson] mentioned the threat to the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh because of a possible boycott by the black Commonwealth countries. A surrender to this kind of blackmail should be unthinkable... Well, if these people don't want to come, let them stay at home. They are behaving like spoiled children, who take the huff and won't play because they aren't getting their own way...The people of this country have a right to enjoy what sports they wish, providing these are within the law. They are entitled to this right without being subjected to the illegal interference of any person or body. And there is this further important point. If the militants get their way, and the tour is cancelled, this will be a cowardly surrender to blackmail. It will only be the start. We will find ourselves ruled more and more in sport and other activities by the new dictators.⁸⁰

At least in this respect, these themes essentially mirror the content of the reaction to 1986, although 1986 had a much stronger politically nationalist dimension – this "nationalism" was not only associated the SNP, but was played on by the Scottish Labour Party to oppose the Conservative Westminster government.⁸¹ In total, with regard to 1970, the sum of reactions to the possible boycott from the newspapers, local government, and the SNP showed an unwillingness to directly engage with an issue that was, across the political spectrum, thought to be outside of Scotland's control, irrespective of history.

Conclusion

Arguably, Scotland was a bystander to the international diplomacy that ultimately saved the 1970 Commonwealth Games from boycott. From the 1960s through to the late 1980s, Scotland's sporting relationship with South Africa and Rhodesia was mediated both directly and indirectly by the British Government. As we have seen here, this relationship was complex: tensions between Scottish and Westminster perspectives were often played out within the diplomatic arena of sport. Despite many different Scottish institutions being vocal

on the subject, there was nevertheless a diversity of opinion within the likes of the press and local government which ensured that there was no coherent approach to the problem of the threatened boycott. This was additionally reflected in the attitudes of NGBs and sportspeople in Scotland, who continued to negotiate their own relationships (or lack thereof) with Africa's white minority regimes on an individual basis. The issues discussed within this article largely set the stage for the second time Edinburgh would host the Commonwealth Games – 1986 – where once again Scotland was forced to ask hard questions of itself, its relationship with its historic and contemporary relationships with the Empire/Commonwealth, the British Government, and the apartheid regime of South Africa.⁸²

¹ Matthew L. McDowell and Fiona Skillen, "The Edinburgh 1970 British Commonwealth Games: Representations of Identities, Nationalism and Politics," *Sport in History* 34.3 (2014): 454-75.

² Jordi Xifra, "Building Sport Countries' Overseas Identity and Reputation: A Case Study of Public Paradiplomacy," *American Behavioral Scientist* 53.4 (2009): 504-15; César García, "The Use of Sports as a Tool of Public Diplomacy in Regions or 'Stateless Nations,'" *Journal of Sports Media* 7, no. 2 (2012): 115-28.

³ For the purposes of this article, we will be referring to Zimbabwe by the name used most commonly in its official and external relationships during the period.

⁴ Arthur McMaster and Alan Bairner, "Junior Ministers in the UK: The Role of the Minister for Sport" *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (2012): 214-37.

⁵ Cleve Dheensaw, *The Commonwealth Games: The First 60 Years, 1930-1990* (Orca Book Publishers, 1994), 2.

⁶ William Carmichael and M. MacIntyre Hood, *Official History of the IXth British Commonwealth Games*, (The Organising Committee of the Games, 1970), 404.

⁷ Cooper, *Times*, 20 October 1891

⁸ Norton Hervey Crowe, quoted in Dheensaw, *The Commonwealth Games*, 8.

⁹ Michael Dawson, "Breaking away from the 'big boys'? Jamaican and "White Commonwealth" expectations at the 1966 British Empire & Commonwealth Games," *Sport in History* 34.3 (2014): 431-453.

¹⁰ Christopher Merrett, "'In Nothing Else are the Deprived so Deprived': South African Sport, Apartheid and Foreign Relations, 1945-1971," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 13.2 (1996): 146-165; Idem, "Sport and apartheid," *History Compass* 3 (2005): 1-11.

¹¹ Andrew Novak, "Sport and Racial Discrimination in Colonial Zimbabwe: A Reanalysis," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 29.6 (2012): 850-67.

¹² Douglas Booth, *The Race Game: Sport and Politics in South Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); John Nauright, *Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997); Jennifer Hargreaves, "Women's sport, development, and cultural diversity: the South African experience", *Women's Studies International Forum* 20.2 (1997): 191-209.

¹³ Scottish football's relationship with colonial Zimbabwe will be the subject of an article by Matthew L. McDowell currently under review.

¹⁴ Little, "Rhodesia reconsidered", 196.

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- ¹⁵ Andrew Novak, "Averting an African Boycott: British Prime Minister Edward Heath and Rhodesian Participation in the Munich Olympics," *Britain and the World* 6.1 (2013): 27-47.
- ¹⁶ Letter from IGF Gray to Joseph Kidd, Scottish Education Department (hereafter SED), 14 April 1970, ED 62/9, "Sporting Visits to Rhodesia" (hereafter "SVR"), NRS.
- ¹⁷ Letter from Sir John Lang to Goring-Morris, Rhodesia Desk, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (hereafter FCO), 15 April 1970, ED 62/9, "SVR", NRS.
- ¹⁸ Little, "Rhodesia reconsidered", 195.
- ¹⁹ C&A, 15 May 1970.
- ²⁰ Chris Bolsmann, "Professional Football in Apartheid South Africa: Leisure, Consumption and Identity in the National Football League, 1959-1977," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 30.16 (2013): 1947-61.
- ²¹ Teleprint of phone conversation between FCO and the Scottish Football Association (SFA), 15 April 1970; Letter from Sir John Lang to Joseph Kidd, 24 April 1970, ED 62/9, "SVR", NRS.
- ²² Informal and handwritten memo, dated 17 March 1972 (signatures given but not legible; authors not specified), ED 62/9, "SVR", NRS.
- ²³ Letter from W.M. Schwab to Joseph Kidd, 16 April 1971; Letter from Joseph Kidd to W.M. Schwab, 19 April 1971; Letter from B.H. Evans to W.M. Schwab, 29 April 1971; Letter from Eldon Griffiths (recipient s unspecified), 25 May 1971; Question from Brynmor John (asked 20 May 1971) to Eldon Griffiths (answered on 25 May 1971): ED 62/9, "SVR", NRS.
- ²⁴ IM Robertson, Scottish Education Department, "Sports Council grants for teams visiting South Africa", 4 April 1974, ED 62/9, "SVR", NRS.
- ²⁵ Clip of *Daily Mail*, 8 March 1974, ED62/104, "SVSA", NRS.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Informal and handwritten memo entitled "GB team wanting to go to S Africa & Rhodesia", dated 14 March 1974 (signature given but not legible; author not specified), ED62/104, "SVSA", NRS.
- ²⁸ Written question (typed) from James Sillars to Gordon Campbell, 18 February 1971, including background note (listed as "not for Hansard"), ED62/104, "SVSA", NRS.
- ²⁹ DR, 1 May 1970.
- ³⁰ Scottish Education and Action for Development, *Supping with the Devil: Scotland's Apartheid Connection* (Edinburgh: SEAD Campaigns 1990), 30.
- ³¹ DR, 1 May 1970.
- ³² Bruce Kidd, "The campaign against Sport in South Africa," *International Journal* 43.4 (1988): 652-54.
- ³³ Kevin Jefferys, *Sport and Politics in Modern Britain: The Road of 2012* (London: Palgrave, 2012), 190-192.
- ³⁴ Donald Macintosh, Donna Greenhorn, and David Black, "Canadian Diplomacy and the 1978 Edmonton Commonwealth Games," *Journal of Sport History* 19.1 (1992): 26-55.
- ³⁵ Malcolm MacLean, "Anti-Apartheid Boycotts and the Affective Economies of Struggle: The Case of Aotearoa New Zealand," *Sport in Society* 13.1 (2010): 72-91.
- ³⁶ Matthew L. McDowell and Fiona Skillen, "The 1986 Commonwealth Games: Scotland, South Africa, sporting boycotts, and the former British Empire," *Sport in Society* (pre-published online 2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2015.1088725>.
- ³⁷ Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics, 1907-present* (3rd ed) (London: Routledge, 1998), 169-97.
- ³⁸ Catriona MM Macdonald, *Whaur Extremes Meet: Scotland's Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2009), 216-41; Ewen A. Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle, Impaled upon a Thistle: Scotland Since 1880* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 263-88.

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- ³⁹ Charles Little, "The sports boycott against Rhodesia reconsidered," *Sport in Society* 14.2 (2011): 195.
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- ⁴¹ Kidd, "The campaign against Sport in South Africa," 652-54.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Bruce K. Murray, "The Sports Boycott and Cricket: The Cancellation of the 1970 South African Tour of England," *South African Historical Journal* 46.1 (2002): 220.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 227-28; Roger Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid: A history of the movement in Britain* (London: The Merlin Press, 2005), 97-103. For more on Hain's views on the STST, see Peter Hain, *Don't Play with Apartheid: The Background to the Stop The Seventy Tour Campaign* (London: George Allen, 1971)
- ⁴⁵ Minutes of the Meeting of the Test and County Cricket Board, 10-11 December 1969, in Murray, "Cancellation", 228.
- ⁴⁶ Murray, "Cancellation", 229.
- ⁴⁷ *Edinburgh Evening News* (hereafter *EEN*), 24 April 1970.
- ⁴⁸ *EEN*, 27 April 1970.
- ⁴⁹ *EEN*, 24 April 1970.
- ⁵⁰ *EEN*, 27 April 1970.
- ⁵¹ *EEN*, 29 April 1970.
- ⁵² Minutes of the 41st Meeting of the Executive Committee, 22 May 1970, ED27/492, "Commonwealth Games, 1970 – Executive Committee", National Records of Scotland (hereafter NRS).
- ⁵³ Statement from Walter Winterbottom OBE, Director of the Sports Council, 14 May 1970, NRS, ED62/104, "Sporting Visits to South Africa" (hereafter "SVSA").
- ⁵⁴ Murray, "Cancellation", 236-39.
- ⁵⁵ McDowell and Skillen, "The 1986 Commonwealth Games". For more on the broader anti-apartheid in the UK, see Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid*. Additionally, for more on strategies devised in anti-apartheid movements in the Caribbean and New Zealand respectively, see Aviston D. Downes, "Sport and international diplomacy: The case of the Commonwealth Caribbean and the Anti-Apartheid Campaign, 1959-1992," *The Sports Historian* 22.2 (2002): 23-45., and Malcolm MacLean, "Football as Social Critique: Protests Movements, Rugby and History in Aotearoa, New Zealand," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 14.2-3 (2000): 255-77.
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- ⁵⁷ Bryan S. Glass, "Protection from the British Empire? Central Africa and the Church of Scotland", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41.3 (2013): 475-95.
- ⁵⁸ Alan Bairner, "Football and the idea of Scotland," in *Scottish Sport and the Making of the Nation: Ninety Minute Patriots?*, ed. Grant Jarvie and Graham Walker (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), 9-26.
- ⁵⁹ *EEN*, 27 April 1970.
- ⁶⁰ *EEN*, 28 April 1970.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² *EEN*, 15 May 1970.
- ⁶³ McDowell and Skillen, "1986 Commonwealth Games".
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⁶⁷ *EEN*, 13 May 1970.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Jonathan Hyslop, "Cape Town Highlanders, Transvaal Scottish: Military "Scottishness" and Social Power in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century South Africa," *South African Historical Journal* 47 (2002): 110-14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *EEN*, 21 May 1970.

⁷² *Daily Record* (hereafter *DR*), 15 May 1970.

⁷³ McDowell and Skillen, "1986 Commonwealth Games".

⁷⁴ *DR*, 20 May 1970.

⁷⁵ *Press and Journal* (hereafter *P&J*), 28 April 1970.

⁷⁶ *P&J*, 12 May 1970.

⁷⁷ *Evening Times*, 7 May 1970.

⁷⁸ *EEN*, 27 Apr. 1970.

⁷⁹ *EEN*, 13 May 1970.

⁸⁰ *Courier and Advertiser* (hereafter *C&A*), 13 May 1970.

⁸¹ McDowell and Skillen, "1986 Commonwealth Games".

⁸² *Ibid.*